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ABSTRACT

A profile of master's programs and the relationship of the master's to the doctorate in affiliated programs were studied, based on survey responses from 52 programs, 43 of which were public and 12 private. It was found that the master's degree is a professional, practice-oriented degree for those interested in entry and midlevel positions in higher education institutions. Administration/management and student affairs specialties dominate this degree, providing a balance of theoretical knowledge and practical skills for both predoctoral and terminal degree candidates. Affiliated master's degrees place more emphasis on theory and research than master's only programs, which tend to emphasize methodology, practice, and job-related course content. While the master's degree is not a prerequisite for the doctorate in higher education, there is growing interest in its usefulness as a credential for nonacademic positions and in community colleges. Public universities are more likely to offer the master's degree in higher education and to provide more incentives to students through low tuition, assistantships, and campus employment (SW)

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The Master's Degree in Higher Education

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Association for the Study of Higher Education

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ASSOCIATION
FOR THE
STUDY OF
HIGHER EDUCATION

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Sheraton Inner Harbor Hotel in Baltimore, Maryland, November 21-24, 1987. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

This paper analyzes data on the master's degree in higher education derived from a survey I conducted in Spring 1987 of 80 doctoral degree-granting higher education programs that are members of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), and follow-up telephone interviews conducted this Fall with program directors. It has been supplemented by a companion survey I also conducted of 89 members of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education (AAACE), 31 of whose institutions are also members of ASHE; and data gleaned from the 1987 Directory of Graduate Preparation Programs in College Student Personnel (Graham and Keim 1987).

It was initiated at the request of the ASHE Curriculum Committee for the purpose of developing a profile of master's programs, and determining the relationship of the master's to the doctorate in affiliated programs with particular emphasis on program goals, objectives, and curricula. While some data were collected on faculty and students, this was not its main focus. It is a further attempt to expand on aspects of Crosson and Nelson's 1984 profile of higher education doctoral programs (1986) and my own work on the master's degree (Glazer 1986).

In analyzing higher education master's degrees as a class of degrees separate from the doctorate, I am interested in determining whether a different profile emerges and in answering the following questions:

1. Does higher education as a field of study at the master's level have distinct objectives or is it part of a continuum toward the doctorate in the same or related fields?

2. Are there qualitative differences between master's only and affiliated master's degrees?

3. What are the implications of different models in defining the knowledge base for the master's degree in higher education?

Fifty-two programs (65%) responded to my survey of ASHE members; 43 are public, 12 are private. Only six are organized as autonomous units; the majority are components of larger departments or divisions of educational administration, professional studies,

educational leadership, adult and continuing education, or some combination of these. Five have no master's programs, one is being phased out, six offer a generic M.Ed., and three a master's in educational administration with a concentration in higher education.

Degree Designations

The most commonly used degree designations are the Master of Education (M.Ed.) and the Master of Arts (M.A.), the former more typically part of an Ed.D. and the latter of a Ph.D. Some departments offer more than one degree designation linked to admission and degree requirements. The M.Ed. is offered by 25 ASHE programs, the M.A. by 22, and the M.S. by 10; eight offer both the M.A. and M.Ed., two the M.S. and M.Ed., and one the M.A. and M.S. Such degree designations as the M.S.E., M.S.Ed., M.Couns., M.Adult Ed., and M.A.C.Ed. were reported by individual master's only programs, further increasing the diversity of degree designations.

Many universities define the M.Ed. as a professional degree under the supervision of Schools of Education and the M.A. as an academic, research degree administered by the respective Graduate School and subject to its admission and degree requirements. There are also regional differences. For example, the Ed.S. or Educational Specialist, which Dressel and Mayhew referred to as "subdoctoral" (1974), is a two-year Advanced Master's degree offered by public universities in some southern states, either as a terminal degree leading to state certification in community colleges or as an intermediate degree between the master's and the doctorate.

Program Emphases

Several programs were characterized as "generalist" in both objectives and content; others reported a range of specializations or concentrations. Table 1 gives both the specializations and the frequency with which they are offered by responding programs. The total number of specializations offered was 153; the average was three per program. The two largest were Higher Education Administration and Student Personnel followed

by Adult and Continuing Education, Community College Administration, and Policy and Planning. Finance, Institutional Research, and Curriculum and Teaching are offered by fewer departments. Some specialties are also housed in other departments, particularly Adult Education and Educational Technology.

The new ACPA Directory (Graham and Keim 1987) lists 59 affiliated master's programs offering degrees in Student Personnel with the Ed.D. or Ph.D. as the highest degree; 31 are members of ASHE. There are also 58 master's only programs leading to the M.S., M.Ed., M.S.Ed., and M. Couns. Only eight of the affiliated master's programs are housed in departments of higher education while 19 are in departments of counselor education/student personnel services, and 32 are grouped with educational administration, educational leadership, or professional studies. Master's only programs are more frequently referred to as "College Student Personnel" or "Counseling and Human Development." Affiliated master's are more likely to include "Higher Education" in their title.

Sixty programs (67%) responded to my survey of Adult and Continuing Education master's degrees. Of these, 58 percent said they offer both master's and doctoral degrees in this specialty while 42 percent offer only master's degrees. Eleven programs are in departments of higher and adult education; 18 are distributed across adult, vocational, occupational, community college, and teacher education departments; 12 are grouped with educational administration and educational leadership; six with curriculum and instruction, two in agricultural and extension education, and one in interdisciplinary education, a striking portrait of institutional diversity in the organization of graduate education.

Students

Several program directors observed: "We have a small master's program; most of our students are enrolled for the doctorate." In 1986-87, 51 higher education master's programs reported a total of 1,151 students. Of this total, 17 programs had 10 or

fewer students; only six had more than 60 students; the average enrollment was 22. These programs awarded a total of 391 degrees in 1985-86, the most recent year for which data were available. Of these, 34 programs awarded fewer than 10 degrees; only six programs offered more than 20 degrees. The mean number of degrees awarded was eight.

Program descriptions of higher education master's programs emphasize the preparation of post-baccalaureate students for entry or mid-level positions in higher education administration, adult and continuing education, and student affairs, and to a lesser extent, community college teaching and non-academic business operations. In their study of higher education doctoral programs, Crosson and Nelson (1986) found that the main purpose of Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs in higher education was to prepare administrative leaders, college faculty and researchers, and professionals for leadership positions.

I asked program directors how they would define the objectives of students currently enrolled in their programs in each of five categories. Ninety percent identified their students as "practitioners," 45 percent as "predoctoral," 47 percent as "institutional employees," 24 percent as "researchers," and 14 percent as "seeking professional certification." The enrollment of campus staff members is facilitated by the availability of graduate assistantships as well as the symbiotic relationship between campus functions and higher education program objectives. Several directors observed that in addition to serving the needs of employees in their own universities, they also served local and regional needs of community and four-year colleges. To further illustrate the diversity of the master's degree, 88 percent of adult and continuing education program directors said that their graduates obtain positions in higher education; however, between 90 and 95 percent also reported that students work in business and industry, community services, and public schools; 78 percent cited vocational education as an emloyment option.

Analysis of ACPA data (Graham and Keim 1987) indicates that admission requirements are similar for affiliated and master's only programs. The GRE or MAT and a cumulative GPA ranging from 2.5 to 3.0 are required for both types of programs. Master's only programs in College Student Personnel are more likely to require an interview and related work experience. All ACPA programs report that they arrange graduate assistantships and off-campus placements.

Fifty-five percent of ASHE members said they require a master's degree for admission to the doctoral program, although not necessarily in higher education. Some said they encourage students to obtain a master's in other fields or specialties; most said students obtain master's degrees enroute to the doctorate even though 45 percent of the programs said it is not required.

Faculty

Although data on faculty were not the focus of this report, the Curriculum Committee was interested in learning how many faculty teach both master's and doctoral courses compared to the number teaching only master's level courses. Fifty programs reported a total of 291 faculty teaching master's level courses. In comparing the number of faculty teaching master's level courses, 11 programs included some faculty in both categories. A total of 245 faculty teach both master's and doctoral courses; 46 teach only master's level students. Thirty-eight programs (76%) make no distinction between master's and doctoral faculty while 12 programs have master's level only faculty.

Curriculum

In structure, higher education master's programs are quite similar although they may range from 30 to 60 credit hours in core courses, electives, and integrative experiences. Emphasis on fieldwork correlates closely to the specialization selected and is more common in Student Personnel than in Administration. While one or two courses in research methods are generally required, extensive use is made of coursework in fundamental principles of higher education and in electives that develop desired

competencies in a specific area. At least 50 percent of non-thesis coursework is in core courses (15-18 hours) with a comparable amount in the specialty. The thesis option generally carries 3 to 6 credit hours while the supervised practicum/internship ranges from 3 to 12 credit hours over a period of one semester or one year, the latter more likely in 45 to 60 credit hour master's programs.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the range of credit hour and other degree requirements in Higher Education, Student Personnel, and Adult Education respectively. In both Student Personnel and Adult Education (Table 3 and 4), comparative data are provided for affiliated and master's only programs in an effort to determine whether there are substantive differences in degree requirements for these types of degrees. In Higher Education Administration programs (Table 2), comparative data are provided by degree designation.

As shown in Table 2, credit hour and other requirements in Higher Education show minimal differences in structure across degree designations. The average number of credit hours for the master's degree ranges from 32 to 36 credits, while the average number of required credit hours ranges from 16 to 21. The M. Ed. more frequently requires a written comprehensive examination, project or research paper, supervised field experience, and minor concentration; and the M.A. and M.S. a thesis and oral defense. The issue of degree ambiguity is illustrated by the fact that while 11 programs permit students to take undergraduate courses as part of the master's, ranging from three to 18 credits, 45 percent permit master's students to enroll in any of their doctoral courses, 47 percent in most courses, and only eight percent limit their enrollments to introductory courses.

In the ACPA survey (Graham and Keim 1987), 21 of the 58 affiliated Student Development programs indicated they had no "doctoral only" courses, 14 had one or two, and only four restricted enrollments in five or more courses. Affiliated master's programs in Student Personnel (Table 3) place greater emphasis on coursework, a thesis,

and a written comprehensive examination than master's only programs which emphasize the supervised field experience. Both types include more requirements than higher education administration programs, consistent with guidelines and standards of the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) for Student Services/Development Programs. Increased requirements may also be due to the terminal nature of master's programs in this specialty.

By contrast, I found few distinctions between affiliated and master's only programs in Adult Education (Table 4) although program directors indicated that the thesis, internship, and comprehensive examination were more likely to be required for the doctorate than the master's degree. The M.Ed. in Adult Education tends to require more of everything—coursework, comprehensives, internships, practica, and minor concentrations. Table 4 provides a breakdown of degree requirements in Adult Education, comparing 32 affiliated and 21 master's only programs.

To get some idea of the nature of the master's curriculum in ASHE programs in particular, I asked program directors to indicate the courses required of all degree candidates for the master's degree in higher education. Table 5 groups these courses into 11 categories in order of frequency. If core courses in Student Personnel and Adult Education were included, this list would be considerably expanded and diversified. This table parallels Crosson and Nelson's findings for doctoral courses which is not surprising, given the overlap in course offerings between degree levels (1986, p. 341).

Innovative Strategies

I also wanted to get some idea of the nature and extent of innovation and change in higher education master's programs. Twelve of the responding programs offer dual master's degrees, nine with other departments in Schools of Education and three with business and law schools. More than 50 percent utilize flexible scheduling, mainly through weekend and evening courses; 21 offer off-campus courses; two offer degrees at branch campuses; five offer telecourse instruction. The strong experiential learning

component that is built into 28 programs through internships and practica points up the practical orientation of the higher education master's degree. In some cases, the generic degree was described as interdisciplinary in content, with students selecting courses from two or more divisions. Adult education master's degree programs incorporate more flexible approaches than either Student Personnel or Higher Education Administration, reflecting the non-traditional nature of adult learning. Forty-three Adult Education programs offer on-site coursework; 36 incorporate flexible scheduling, e.g., weekend, evening, and short courses; 16 use telecourses; 11 have dual degrees.

Conclusions

The master's degree in higher education is a professional, practice-oriented degree designed for postbaccalaureate students interested in entry and mid-level positions in higher education institutions. Administration/management and student affairs specialties dominate this degree, providing a balance of theoretical knowledge and practical skills for both predoctoral and terminal degree candidates. Affiliated master's degrees place more emphasis on theory and research than master's only programs which tend to emphasize methodology, practice, and job-related course content.

The master's degree is not a prerequisite for the doctorate in higher education, but there is growing interest in the degree as a useful credential for those in non-academic positions and in community colleges. Thirteen universities that were listed by Dressel and Mayhew as offering only the doctorate in higher education in 1974 now offer the master's degree as well. Program directors report external pressure from state boards, alumni, and postsecondary institutions to recast the master's degree in higher education as an advanced degree that meets credentialing needs of community college personnel, career needs of non-traditional adults, and institutional needs for student development and business functions.

Public universities are more likely to offer the master's degree in higher education, and to provide more incentives to students through low tuition, assistantships, and

campus employment. Some programs are under revision while two recently initiated new specialties in Student Personnel with more practical content, less research, and a de-emphasis on predoctoral preparation.

The ambiguity between degree levels is worth noting in this context. The traditional master's is more likely to resemble the baccalaureate than the doctorate in structure and outcomes. However, in higher education, the relationship between the master's and doctorate is strong. The affiliated master's is part of a continuum in which a common core of knowledge and skills is followed by advanced study based on a shared foundation. The more specialized master's only program reverses this continuum since it does not assume theoretical research-based advanced study at the doctoral level.

The function of the M.Ed. in higher education is quite different than the Ed.D. or Ph.D. and this is reflected in the curriculum. In effect, higher education is not a single profession but many variations on one. The proliferation of higher education institutions has engendered greater specialization in programs that train "higher educators." What emerges is an academic model on the one hand in the M.A./Ph.D. continuum juxtaposed to a professional model in the M.Ed. with or without a subsequent Ed.D. These overlapping models reinforce the professional orientation of the master's degree, its diversity, and its ambiguous role in the degree hierarchy. This dichotomy can be attributed to several factors: (1) the nature of the academic organization with its emphasis on the doctorate as the desired credential for both teaching and administration; (2) the proliferation of areas of specialization in complex higher education institutions; (3) the increasingly diverse backgrounds and career objectives of potential students; and (4) the relationship of faculty strengths to program development.

There are now no accreditation guidelines or standards for traditional master's programs in Higher Education Administration analogous to state standards for training school district administrators. Both, the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs (CAS) and the Commission of Professors of Adult

and Continuing Education (AAACE) recommend standards for these two specialties in Higher Education. it is uncertain whether the development of guidelines or standards would enhance higher education as a field of study at the master's level but it is a topic worthy of further investigation.

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Table 1

Specializations

Area	No. Programs (N=52)	% Programs
Administration/Management	39	75%
Student Personnel (1)	37	71.0
Adult/Continuing Education (2)	20	38.5
Community College Administration	17	32.7
Policy/Planning	9	17.3
Finance	7	13.5
Institutional Research	5	9.6
Curriculum/Teaching	5	9.6
Educational Technology	3	5.7
Institutional Advancement	3	5.7
History/Philosophy	2	3.8
Organizational Development	1	1.9
Facilities Management	1	1.9

(1) Student Personnel programs offer three main specializations in Administration, Student Development, and Counseling.

(2) Adult/Continuing Education programs offer specializations in Human Resource Development, Administration, Gerontology, Extension Services, Vocational/Technical and Community Education.

Table 2

Degree Requirements in Higher Education Administration

Requirement	M.A.	M.S.	M.Ed.
	(N=22)	(N=10)	(N=24)
No. Credit Hrs.	30-60	30-42	30-60
Mean Credit Hrs.	36	32	33
No. Core Courses	0-12	2-12	1-10
Mean Core Courses	6	6	5
No. Required Credit Hrs.	0-36	6-36	3-30
Mean Required Credit Hrs.	18	16	16
No. Undergraduate Credits	3-6	6-9	6-18
Mean Undergraduate Credits	6	3	6
		No. Applicable Programs	
Residency Requirement	5	3	3
Thesis	8	3	5
Practica/Internships	11	6	11
Comprehensives	13	7	18
Computer Literacy	5	2	3
Minor	1	—	7
Project/Paper	—	—	3

Source: Survey of ASHE Programs, 1987.

Table 3

Requirements for Affiliated and Master's Only Degrees In College Student Personnel

Requirement	Affiliated	Master's Only
	(N=58)	(N=59)
No. Credit Hours	30-60	30-60
Mean Credit Hours	44	40
No. Core Courses	0-20	0-20
Mean Core Courses	6	7
	Number of Applicable Programs	
Thesis	32	29
Thesis options		
Research Paper	11	15
Courses	9	3
Either RP or Courses	5	5
Research Courses		
1 course	29	36
2-4 courses	23	15
Internships (3-12 cr.)	32	37
Practica (3-9 cr.)	38	49
Comprehensives	47	33
Written	27	18
Oral	8	3
Both	7	8
In lieu of thesis	5	4

Source: Directory of Graduate Preparation Programs in College Student Personnel (Graham and Keim 1987).

Table 4

Degree Requirements in Adult and Continuing Education Programs

Requirement	Affiliated	Master's Only
	(N=32)	(N=21)
No. Credit Hrs.	30-45	29-48
Mean Credit Hrs.	36	34
No. Core Courses	3-6	2-10
Mean Credit Hrs.	5	5
No. Required Credits	6-18	12-30
Mean Required Credits	14	16
	Number of Applicable Programs	
Residency	11	10
Thesis(1)	10	10
Internship/Practica	10	12
Comprehensives	24	15
Research/Statistics	23	18
Computer Literacy	6	1
Minor Concentration	10	7
Research Paper/Project	2	1

(1) Thesis may be option in lieu of comprehensive examination

Source: Survey of AAACE Programs, 1987.

Table 5

Core Courses in Higher Education Master's Programs

(N=45)

Administration/Management	25
Organization and Administration of Higher Education	
Administrative Principles and Practices	
Governance and Administration in Higher Education	
Foundations (Contextual Studies)	20
History of Higher Education	
Philosophy or Sociology of Higher Education	
Perspectives in Higher Education	
Intellectual and Social History of Education	
Educational Ideas	
History of Universities	
Students	19
The American College Student	
Research on the College Student	
The Student in Higher Education	
Student Development in Higher Education	
Curriculum/Instruction	16
Curriculum and Instruction in Higher Education	
The Academic Department	
Academic Programs: Development and Implementation	
Effective College Teaching	
Principles and Problems of Instruction	
Academic Program Management	
Evaluation of Academic Programs	

General Higher Education	11
American College and University	
Introduction to American Higher Education	
The American College	
Higher Education in the United States	
The Higher Education Institution	
Educational Psychology (Cognitive Foundations)	11
Human Development Theory	
Human Growth and Development	
Principles of Human Learning	
Psychological Bases in Postsecondary Education	
Psychology in Education	
Finance and Economics	11
Economics of Postsecondary Education	
Financial Aspects of Higher Education	
Budgeting and Finance	
Computer Applications in Higher Education	
Budgeting in Higher Education	
Community College	10
The Community College	
Junior and Community College	
Community Junior College in America	
Community College Administration	
Law	8
Law in Higher Education	
Legal Aspects of Higher Education	
Higher Education Law	

Policy/Planning	8
Leadership and Planning	
Educational Leadership	
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Current Issues in Higher Education	
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Trends and Issues in Higher Education	
Recurring Issues in Higher Education	

Source: Survey of ASHE Programs, 1987.